

Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-round

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—With Les Whitten

WASHINGTON — George Bush had a dubious career in the cloak-and-dagger business before President Ford named him to be the nation's spy chief.

As the Republican National Chairman during the Watergate uproar, Bush did a little extracurricular spying on the Senate Watergate Committee's respected chief investigator, Carmine Bellino.

The story is told in a Senate staff memo which was withheld from publication. Bush was eager to prove that the Democrats, too, had engaged in Watergate-style politics. So he tried to pin down a rumor that Bellino had used electronic equipment to snoop on the Republicans during the 1960 election campaign.

To get the evidence, Bush relied upon an undercover operative named John Buckley — a Damon Runyon character whom the memo identifies "as a political spy with the code name 'Fat Jack.'" He had gained a measure of notoriety earlier for directing a snooping operation against Sen. Ed Muskie, D-Me.

Fat Jack secured an affidavit, according to the memo, from a private eye named John Leon who happily attested that Bellino had eavesdropped on unsuspecting Republicans. Leon had made his reputation breaking down doors in domestic relations cases.

On July 24, 1793, with much fanfare, Bush told a press conference that he had evidence of Bellino's electronic eavesdropping.

The Senate Watergate committee set up a special subcommittee which wasted hundreds of hours investigating Bush's alleged findings. The subcommittee found the charges wholly groundless.

The memo alleges that Bush ducked out on the Senate investigation. "He was not allowed by (the Republican party counsel Jerris) Leonard to be questioned by staff members," declares the memo.

Now the amiable Bush is waiting Senate confirmation as the new CIA chief.

Footnote: Leonard told us that Bush was unaware of Fat Jack's background. If the subcommittee had wanted Bush's testimony, Leonard added, it could have subpoenaed him. Bush insisted there was nothing political in his abortive effort to nail Bellino.

COLSON CONFIDENTIAL: In the first book from Richard Nixon's inner circle, Charles "Chuck" Colson has given some fascinating insights into the Watergate era.

We published highlights of the Colson book, "Born Again," in an earlier column. From our bootleg copy, here are a few more revelations:

— The triumphant Richard Nixon could hardly bring himself to respond

gracefully after Sen. George McGovern, D-S.D., conceded the loss of the 1972 election.

Nixon began "composing one draft after another of a telegram to send to his vanquished opponent . . ." recalls Colson. "It was now close to two in the morning. McGovern had conceded hours earlier.

"By the rules of the game, Nixon's response was long overdue. Yet, as fast as the words rolled off his tongue, he would reject them."

Finally Nixon, the master of dirty politics, turned to Colson and said: "How can I say something nice after he kept comparing me to Hitler?"

— Colson confesses ruefully that he "should have been wary of the spy business" after a pre-Watergate episode involving plumber E. Howard Hunt.

The celebrated waterbugger sought to pump a CIA operative about the possible involvement of ex-President John F. Kennedy in the 1963 Diem coup in South Vietnam. In his characteristic conspiratorial fashion, Hunt arranged a rendezvous in a vacant office which he had carefully bugged. He planted the tape recorder under the couch and secured a bottle of Scotch so the CIA man "would talk more freely."

"For two hours, the two men guzzled a fifth of the White House's best," recounts

Colson, "while I awaited the results in my office." At last Hunt appeared, bleary-eyed, tie askew. He stammered sheepishly that the evening was a waste, he had no tape.

It turned out that Hunt had sat heavily on the couch over his own recording machine, "crushing the sensitive equipment." Lacking the evidence to embarrass President Kennedy, Hunt later simply concocted it in a series of forged papers.

— The White House paranoia against the press, according to Colson, was beyond belief. Once an order came down declaring: "No one on the staff is to see a reporter from the New York Times for any purpose whatsoever."

Another time, Colson was seen lunching with liberal columnist Joseph Kraft. Afterward Colson was summoned before White House staff chief H.R. Haldeman who dressed him down. "If you want to stay around here, stay away from that (bleep)!!; snapped Haldeman.

— During the May, 1970, anti-war demonstrations in Washington, Colson reports, a battalion of Air Force troops were hiding out in the Executive Office Building in full combat dress, complete with camouflaged helmets, ready to defend the White House next door from a possible mob attack.